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MARKE



FORM+FUNCTION

BY JOHN PIERSON

A Symbol Is Worth A Thousand Words About Acceptance

HOW DO AMERICANS without disabilities really feel about disabilities? And how much are they willing to spend to tell the disabled which facilities welcome them? An Irish designer, studying and working in Cincinnati, is raising fundamental questions.

Brendan Murphy wants to change that best-known of access symbols: the stick figure in the wheelchair. For decades the symbol has marked doors, ramps, telephones and toilet stalls.



Working with a student grant received last year from the Society for Environmental Graphic Design, a professional group, the 31-year-old has rushed in where many older designers fear to tread. For starters, he has redrawn the wheelchair symbol to send a more "positive" message.

The current symbol ...

Next, he has taken a big leap to a completely new "universal" symbol: an open door that is meant to apply to all impairments — those affecting sight, hearing, thinking, moving about. Its message is simple: "Come in. This place is for everyone."

"Everyone" means the 49 million people who, according to federal figures, are "with disabilities," as well as those who, at some point in their lives, will be disabled by youth, old age, sickness or injury.

Nice philosophy. But what about the cash that may be needed to put

wheelchair symbol, the federal Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, has long entertained doubts about it. In an internal paper written 20 years ago, a staffer noted that "society attaches a stigma to a wheelchair [and] the person in it." She added: "Not only does it not address other disability needs, but it is not even understandable by any individual who is blind."

Getting the many disability advocacy groups to agree on a single symbol of access won't be easy. San Antonio city planner Judy Babbitt circulated the Murphy symbols among 200 experts in Texas. Reaction was decidedly mixed.

Belinda Carlton, director of the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities, polled some 50 representatives of disability groups and found a consensus against the active figure. "That symbol's not going to change society's image about people with disabilities," she says. Jim Boyce of the state architectural barriers office told Ms. Babbitt that none of his staff viewed the symbol as positive.

But Kaye Beneke of the Texas Rehabilitation Commission says she found the active-wheelchair design to be "progressive, new and modern." She sees no reason why it couldn't be introduced gradually. And Howard Donahoe, a wheelchair user who is on the boards of several disability groups, notes a universal symbol, like Mr. Murphy's open door, would save money compared with many icons for many disabilities.

Mr. Murphy's open door begs another question about America: Just how open are most people to those with disabilities? Mr. Murphy recalls growing up in an Ireland where he, a crack runner, ran a lot of races with

Airlines Sh

By JONATHAN DAHL

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Peter Chaffetz didn't think flying country could get any more uncomfortable stepped on board one of United Airlines' planes.

Gone was the wide-body jet he had expected for long-distance travel. In its place, a skinny Boeing 757 with less legroom, fewer

TRAVEL

head bins and smaller seats. Worst of all, Chaffetz felt trapped in his seat for hours. The plane only had one aisle. "This is ridiculous," says the Los Angeles attorney.

The airline industry has spent more than \$1 billion over the past four years on a new fleet for its most popular U.S. routes—and customers are still angry in the process. In a move to cut costs, airlines put new—but decidedly narrower—routes that had once been the province of wide-body jets. Travelers get about half as much legroom as they did on most three-to-five-hour flights.

"These are the kinds of planes that a consumer could like," says Ed Perkins, a senior analyst at Travel Letter. "The airlines have shrunk things down to an impossible level."

Some travelers dislike the skinny models.

AUTOS

'Nearly New' Cars Buff Up The

By GABRIELLA STERN

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Used cars are coming in from the cold.

With high new-car prices pushing more customers into buying used cars, auto dealers are lavishing more attention on what was once the unglamorous stepchild of their business. They are bringing used vehicles into the showroom, organizing them by price and category and putting more marketing muscle behind them.

One dealer's gimmick has boosted used-car sales 30% in the past four months. In Simsbury, Conn., dealer Mark Mitchell has recently begun advertising "Florida Fresh" used vehicles. Since October, he

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Nice philosophy. But what about the cash that may be needed to put Mr. Murphy's symbols onto walls everywhere? U.S. business and government have spent vast sums on ramps, signs, doors, toilets, grab bars and other changes. If Mr. Murphy's symbols become required under the Americans With Disabilities Act, still more money will be spent.

Adopted by a world congress in 1969, the wheelchair, or International Symbol of Access, has undergone minor design changes over the past quarter-century. Still, in Mr. Murphy's view, the wheelchair figure remains "dependent, rigid, helpless." Robert Probst, the designer's former teacher at the University of Cincinnati, calls the symbol "a lifeless committee job."

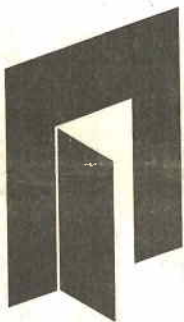
In his first, evolutionary version of the access symbol, Mr. Murphy shows a person who's "independent and active." The stick figure rises from the wheelchair, leans forward and pushes up with its arms.

Reactions from the graphic design community have been cautiously favorable. Sarah Speare, executive director of the Boston-based environmental graphic design group, praises Mr. Murphy's symbols as "designed with his heart." Yet the society has warned that the new access designs present "liability issues"—for example, injury resulting from confusion over an unfamiliar and unapproved symbol. Nora Olgay, a graphic designer in Washington, notes that it took eight years for a symbol for "emergency exit," designed in Japan, to go international.

Even the U.S. keeper of the

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... And Mr. Murphy's ideal

those with disabilities? Mr. Murphy recalls growing up in an Ireland where he, a crack runner, ran a lot of races with wheelchair athletes.

"Also, there were kids with cerebral palsy and multiple sclerosis;" each was "basically one of the lads."

And young Mr. Murphy hopes that his new access symbols might help most Americans see their disabled fellow citizens as "one of the lads." But Roger Whitehouse, a New York graphic designer, doesn't see that kind of inclusion happening in America's "win or lose" society. "If you're blind or in a wheelchair, you're a loser, and you have to take the consequences," says the British-born designer. Nevertheless, he argues that the U.S. is ahead of Europe in creating accessible architecture and systems. And likely to stay ahead, he adds, given America's "energy."

A willingness to include or "mainstream" the disabled may be a matter of national soul more than national energy. But energy can produce dollars for new and better signs. In Austin, Ms. Babbitt was told that without generous "grandfathering" for wheelchair signs, the Murphy signs would cost millions.

Yes. But here's a related hopeful note: A study of Sears Roebuck by the Annenberg Washington Program last year says Sears found that equipment needed to accommodate 97% of its disabled employees cost on average only \$36 per person.

By GABRIELLA STERN

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Used cars are coming in from the cold.

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One dealer's gimmick has boosted his used-car sales 30% in the past four months. In Simsbury, Conn., dealer Mark Mitchell has recently begun advertising "Florida Fresh" used vehicles. Since October, he has been buying 20 or 30 used cars at a time at auctions in Florida and shipping them north. "When you hear Florida," Mitchell says, "you think of sun, no winter weather, no salt on the road, no rust."

Why the used-car push? Dealers are responding to a five-year-old surge in demand for used cars, prompted by changing consumer priorities and sharply higher new-car prices. The average retail price of a used car is around \$11,150, according to marketing firms. That's about half the \$20,000 or so that today's average new car costs.

Another factor fueling the used-car boom is the growing availability of fair, new, low-mileage cars and light trucks coming off two-year and three-year lease. Thanks to auto makers' recent strategy of using low-cost leases to offset high sticker prices, the average used car on dealer lots today is just 3.5 years old, according to Strong Automotive Merchandising, in Birmingham, Ala.

More importantly, used cars are whe

ART

IBM to Sell

By ALEXANDRA PEERS

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

International Business Machines Corp. is almost guaranteed to make a big profit this year in one area — its corporate art collection.

About 300 artworks, the cream of Blue's huge collection, will go on the auction block later this year. The sale will include paintings by American masters Winslow Homer, George Bellows and Marsden Hartley.

The trove is expected to fetch about \$10 million at a series of sales in May and next fall at Sotheby's Holdings Inc.'s New York auction house. Many of the works were purchased during World War II for a tiny fraction of their current value.

The art sale is part of a broad backlash against the expense and perceived waste of corporate art collecting. IBM follows McCrory Corp., USX Corp., Equital Life Assurance Co., PaineWebber Inc. and First Bank of Minneapolis in selling off holdings or scaling back collecting programs.

IBM has made a variety of efforts to improve its bottom line over the past few years. It eliminated 35,000 jobs, sold off corporate jets and closed office buildings. And it closed its IBM Gallery of Science and Art in Manhattan, widely considered to be one of the best small galleries in

Unsolicited Advice to the Plaintiff: Next Time Around, Try Takeout

By ANDREA GERLIN

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

After accepting a \$2 million settlement for injuries allegedly suffered at a restaurant, Annie Marie Leal rose out of her wheelchair and walked — in high heels.

That seems to have proved costly.

It all began in 1989, when a waiter at a Steak & Ale in Houston dropped a tray full of dinners on Ms. Leal's head. She sued, alleging that the Texas-sized steaks had caused her serious head, neck and back injuries.

During much of her trial in a Texas

from the settlement agreement, claiming it could legally do so because the judge hadn't signed the judgment. But the judge refused to hear new evidence, holding that his oral approval was a final judgment. Steak & Ale appealed, but a state appeals court affirmed the settlement, reasoning that the parties understood the case was over when the judge orally approved it.

Steak & Ale took the case to the Supreme Court of Texas, which yesterday reversed the appeals-court ruling and sent the case back to the trial court. The high court said that when the judge orally